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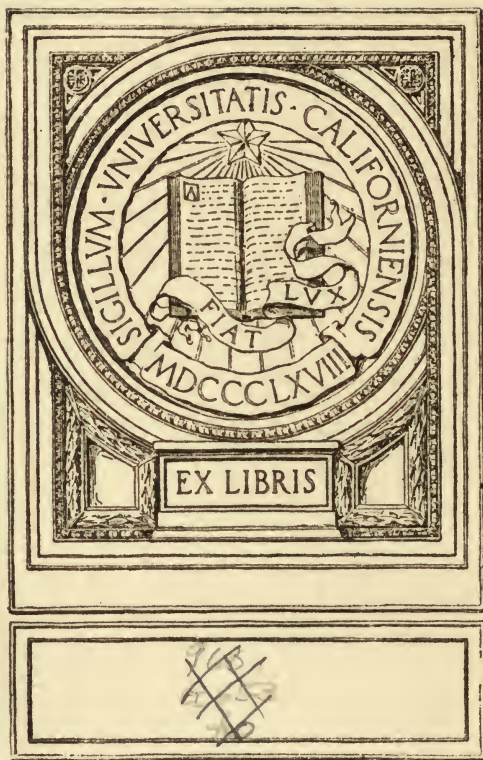


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HOLBEIN IN BLACKFRIARS





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HOLBEIN IN BLACKFRIARS

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THE STAGE GUILD

1527 Railway Exchange Building

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HOLBEIN IN BLACKFRIARS

An Improbable Comedy by

KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN
& THOMAS WOOD STEVENS



THE
STAGE GUILD
CHICAGO

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CHICAGO

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THE STAGE GUILD
1527 RAILWAY EXCHANGE BUILDING
CHICAGO, ILL.

HOLBEIN IN BLACKFRIARS

PS351
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1913
MAIN

CHARACTERS:

Hans Holbein
Mistress Chepster, his landlady.
Margaret, her daughter.
Nicholas Moxon, a model.
An Old Gentleman in Search of Prints.
A Patron in Search of a Design for a German
Stove.
Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex.
King Henry VIII.

SCENE

Holbein's studio at his lodging in Blackfriars,
London.

*Holbein is discovered painting a portrait of the King,
Moxon posing, Margaret sitting by, seeing to it that the
painter does not cease work.*

MOXON. I've an itch on my nose.

MARGARET. What of it? He'll not leave off painting
this hour yet.

MÓXON. I tell ye both, I've a beggarly gnawing itch
on my nose. Furthermore, I should have had my half
gallon of beer this long time gone. I warn thee I shall
move if I'm not paid attention to.

HOLBEIN. Hold thy tongue, or I'll bid Meg to cover
thy face again with the napkin.

MOXON. Will no one bring me my beer? Will no one scratch my nose?

HOLBEIN. I've said naught against lifting thy hand. Thunder of God! Scratch thine own nose and have done with thy talk.

MOXON. What good in lifting my hand when there's no flagon of beer to lift with it. Furthermore if I scratch my own nose, the itch will but settle between my shoulder blades.

HOLBEIN. [*Putting down his brush.*] Go out and drown thyself in beer. Go out and scratch thyself all over!

MOXON. Vulgar man! Listen to him, Meg. It points what I am always saying about foreigners,—low every-one of them—low.

HOLBEIN. Get down off thy throne and be damned to thee!

MOXON. Aye. And when I do, thou'll not get me up again, let me tell thee.

MARGARET. Thou'lt not get down, Nick Moxon. Thou'lt stay where thee's put.

MOXON. Sir Nicholas Moxon, by thy leave! I'd have thee remember that I am a gentleman,—a gentleman fallen upon evil times, but still a gentleman. Furthermore, thou hast no manners, Meg; no manners at all. Every night I go home and weep about thy manners.

MARGARET. So much as lift thy leg to get off that throne and it's thy own shins thou'lt be weeping about.

MOXON. It's thy mother I blame more than thee, lass. Taking a foreigner into the same English home with a growing girl,—to say nothing of forgetting my half gallon of beer.

HOLBEIN. This is too much! Let the man go! I'm done with him for the day.

MARGARET. Thou art nothing of the sort. What will the merchants of the Steelyard say and the portrait of His Gracious Majesty not finished against the grand dinner at the guild hall next week?

HOLBEIN. The devil fly away with the Merchants of the Steelyard! There's time enough.

MARGARET. Oh, aye, and the devil fly away with the ten pounds thou art to get from them, too, I suppose. There is still the head to do.

HOLBEIN. Money, money, money! Always money!

MARGARET. Yes, money, money, money. Fifteen pounds owing my mother, to say nothing of the yellow silk dress thou didst promise me for myself.

HOLBEIN. I'll give thee something better, Meg. A holiday to-morrow, eh! A barge ride on the river to see the King's procession. A holiday with flags to look at, and fat men in cloth of gold, and noblemen in furs, and proud ladies in fine clothes all decorated like a church on Easter. Beautiful ladies, eh? Ha, ha!

MARGARET. I'd rather have the yellow dress. What do I care for flags and fat men.

HOLBEIN. Nay, but the King, Meg! Thou shalt see him, with a gold belt on him, big like the saddlegirth to a Flemish stallion. He's a grand sight, thy Harry of England, dressed in green velvet like a mountain with grass on it. Didst ever see the King himself? Eh?

[*Enter Mistress Chepster.*]

MARGARET. Nay, I never put eyes on him and I'm not like to if I look to thee for the chance.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Meg! Meg! Where's thy respect for Master Holbein!

MARGARET. I haven't any. Get back to thy painting.

HOLBEIN. Thou art a slave-driver, Meg. A naughty, beautiful slave-driver.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Aye, that thou art, Meg! And thou art ungrateful to the good Master Holbein. Think of the wonderful portrait he's done of thee all dressed in the clothes of the Lady Ann of Cleves, her that's become the King's own true and lawful wife, married to him only yesterday by proxy and him never having clapped eyes on her, they do say, but only taking her on the word of Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, for the sake of alliance with the German Protestants.

MARGARET. And it's lucky for her if he didn't see her, and her with dowdy German clothes on her that no English lady would wish to be seen dead in.

MOXON. Aye, that's a gleam of proper spirit, lass. These foreigners—the things they put on their backs!

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. But to think of seeing thine own face atop of royal clothes. Clothes what thou'st sat in thyself for the portrait of a living queen! Where's thy gratitude for that?

MARGARET. I haven't any! I've been the legs and arms and body for too many fine ladies. I've seen too many faces staring at me from my own neck to care if my own face has got atop of royal clothes for once. Ask Nick Moxon there. His stomach has served for half the aldermen of London. Ask him how he'd like to have his own face painted for once.

MOXON. God forbid! I take no pride in my face, nor my stomach either for that matter. It's my hands, my fine hands and knowing how to sit down in good clothes,—that's what makes me what I am, the best model in London.

MARGARET. So that's what you're thinking, is it?

MOXON. Aye, about that and the wicked impudence of young girls. And furthermore, my half gallon of beer that nobody's got me, and a devilish crick in my neck and the natural damned bad taste of foreigners.

MARGARET. There's some in England with bad taste, too, I'm thinking, to judge by what thine Earl of Essex has picked us for a queen.

HOLBEIN. Hold thy tongue, Meg. The portrait is not to be talked on. Go fetch Moxon his beer.

MOXON. Now someone has begun to talk sense.

MARGARET. I'll not fetch him his beer!

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Thou wilt or I will myself.

MOXON. I'll move! I'll break the pose!

MARGARET. I'll take the broom to thee if thou dost.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Give me sixpence, Meg. I've no money in my purse.

MARGARET. No more have I.

HOLBEIN. Confound you all! Beer or no beer, I'll paint no more.

MARGARET. Thou wilt so!

HOLBEIN. I will not.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Peace! Peace, for the love of Heaven! [*A knock at the door.*] Would ye have all the world hear us brawling over beer?

MOXON. And why not? [*Another knock.*]

HOLBEIN. Hush! It may be my Lord Cromwell.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Mercy on us! Come in, sir, come in! [*The First Art Patron, an Old Gentleman, enters.*]

AN OLD GENTLEMAN. Is this where Master Hans, the painter, hath his lodging?

MOXON. Send this be a man wi' a shilling!

HOLBEIN. I am Hans Holbein.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Thou'rt the graver of pictures?

HOLBEIN. Ja.

OLD GENTLEMAN. The same that wrought the Dance of Death in prints? [*Holbein nods.*]

MOXON. Dance o' Death—'e must be treading it now, the old corpus.

HOLBEIN. [*Without looking up*] Meg, get for the gentleman the prints.

OLD GENTLEMAN. And how am I to know about these prints, if they be the true and veritable ones?

HOLBEIN. Meg, those prints!

OLD GENTLEMAN. And so many vile and false ones about. And I must have the set complete, every one, and thine own hand to it, sir.

HOLBEIN. [*Giving up in disgust and taking the prints from Meg.*] So, so! Every one!

OLD GENTLEMAN. Made with thine own hands, and o' thine own devising, Master Hans?

HOLBEIN. Mein Gott! What can I say?

MARGARET. The money, sir. Ten shillings.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Ten shillings!

MOXON. For the love of England, Meg, let him not get away!

MARGARET. Five, then.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Five. [*Takes prints grimly, counts and smiles.*] A bargain! The Dance of Master Hans for five. The collectors of the yard shall never know. Ha, ha! Bargain! [*Exit Art Patron.*]

MOXON. My beer! My, my beer! I had the word of someone that my half gallon of beer would be fetched for me.

HOLBEIN. Cover his face with the napkin! [*Meg covers Moxon's face.*]

MOXON. [*Under the napkin.*] My beer! I will not be put upon in this fashion.

HOLBEIN. Be patient, friend Moxon. Mistress Chepster will run herself to the ale house.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Aye, that I will. [*She goes to the door, where she runs into Lord Cromwell, who enters in a fine rage, followed by a servant.*] Lord have mercy! The earl himself.

CROMWELL. Where's Master Holbein. Ah, so there thou art, eh?

HOLBEIN. I am always the humble servant to my Lord Cromwell.

CROMWELL. Look ye, Master Holbein. I commissioned thee to go with my agent Erskine to Germany, there to make such drawings of the Princess Ann of Cleves as might serve thee in painting a portrait of her. Thou wast granted an audience of full half an hour. A dress belonging to her highness was procured for thee to paint from. And thou didst return to London two weeks ago.

HOLBEIN. It was to the word exact as my lord speaks it.

CROMWELL. Thou hadst the money in advance for thy work.

HOLBEIN. Most generously, yes, my lord.

CROMWELL. Well, what hast thou done? I've seen no portrait. It was to have been in my hands on Monday last. Three times thou hast put off my people with some flowery excuse or other.

HOLBEIN. I have so bad a memory for days, my lord. We artists, it is the nature of us to be such. I have explained that paint must have dryness to be moved. I thought it should be Monday next.

CROMWELL. Monday last! I promised the King he should see it on Monday last. Three times I have put him off. He's become devilish curious to see it. I fancy there must be meddlers.

HOLBEIN. Oh, but one cannot paint a queen without the last touch, my lord, like the sign-board to an ale-house.

CROMWELL. Body of St. George, how much more time must I give thee?

HOLBEIN. Not an hour longer, my lord. I have her already finished this morning.

CROMWELL. Out with her then. I've had a deal of bother on thy account and hers, too.

HOLBEIN. [*To Mistress Chepster.*] Be so good as to uncover the portrait for my lord. [*Mistress Chepster uncovers portrait.*]

CROMWELL. Is—is that the Princess Ann of Cleves? Good God, man, I—I can't believe it!

HOLBEIN. My lord has never seen the lady?

CROMWELL. Aye, ten years ago I saw her. She was a blooming, flaxen haired slip of a thing.

HOLBEIN. Ten years are ten years, my lord. Our women of Germany do not bear well what you call the middle age. I have much experience of them.

CROMWELL. But she can't be like this. It's wicked. It's against nature.

HOLBEIN. I have nothing to do with nature. I paint exact to the life what I can see.

CROMWELL. It's not what I expected. It's not what the King expects. He's in the devil of a temper. If he sees that face to-day it will change the map of Europe!

HOLBEIN. Why must he see it to-day?

CROMWELL. There has been talk. I tell thee he's suspicious of me! He's jumpy as a cat. If I don't show him something he's like to recall the German envoys and annul the marriage. If I show him this, he's sure to. I tell thee I'm ruined.

HOLBEIN. I'm in sorrow, my lord, but it is not my fault.

CROMWELL. Not thy fault! Not thy fault! It is all thy fault. Thou shouldst have made her more beautiful. Thou shouldst have flattered her to suit my needs. Thou shouldst have known how to please the King's fancy.

HOLBEIN. I am not a court painter, my lord. I can only paint the truth.

CROMWELL. Truth? What do I care for truth! This is politics. The King must be satisfied till the envoys are out of England. He must see something pleasant, I tell thee.

HOLBEIN. What would my lord have me do? I am not God to alter the face of her Highness.

CROMWELL. Thou canst alter the portrait.

HOLBEIN. But the King would know the difference in a short while, my lord.

CROMWELL. It is to-day that counts. I shall know well enough how to handle him later. He will be bound hand and foot. I can explain a mistake. I can smooth things over.

HOLBEIN. But the verity of mine art!

CROMWELL. Damn thine art! Without thy help I'm a ruined man.

HOLBEIN. Thou dost me too much honour, my lord.

CROMWELL. Come, as man to man, what's to be done? Use thy wits, Master Hans, if thou hast any.

HOLBEIN. [*Scratching his head.*] Zut! thou art my benefactor. I must help thee. Wait! Yes! [*He steps over and uncovers the portrait of Margaret dressed in the clothes of Ann of Cleves.*] Dost thou see this picture? It is of Meg Chepster there, my landlady's daughter. She sat also for the body of her Highness. I have painted her in the same clothes out of compliment. See, the royal chain, the ermine collar, the order at the breast, all identical but the colour only. Take it. 'Twill serve thy turn, doubtless. Meg's a fair lass. Later thou canst say thy agents found me gone on a holiday and took by mistake the wrong picture.

CROMWELL. Blood of Paul! Thou hast a shrewd head on thee. I'll take it.

MARGARET. Nay, nay, nay! Thou shalt not! 'Tis mine.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. 'Tis our own, my lord, done for us in place of pay for five weeks food and lodging.

MARGARET. Thou shalt not take it.

HOLBEIN. Hush, for the love of God!

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Fifteen shillings extra I allowed for the ermine collar and royal chain.

MARGARET. Half the money is mine if we part with it.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. And five shillings for the order on the breast.

MARGARET. [*To Holbein.*] I say thou shan't give it away.

CROMWELL. Be still, be still, be still! Would you deafen me! [*To Margaret*] Thou shouldst be right glad, girl, to have thy face pass for that of a queen.

MARGARET. Aye, but I'm not. If thou wantest the picture so badly, give me two pounds for the lend of it, and three pounds more against thy keeping it.

CROMWELL. Four pounds.

MARGARET. Five.

CROMWELL. Four pounds ten.

MARGARET. Five, paid into my mother's hand.

HOLBEIN. Meg, thou art a Jew.

CROMWELL. Thou art a shrewd lass. Put out thy hand, woman. [*Mistress Chepster puts out her hand and Cromwell drops coins into it.*]

CROMWELL. [*To servant.*] Here, lad, take this to the coach. [*Cromwell goes to the door.*]

HOLBEIN. Fortune go with thee, my lord!

CROMWELL. Look ye now! Not a word of this. And the other portrait—keep it well covered till I fetch it away.

HOLBEIN. Trust me, my lord. [*Cromwell goes out. Meg following to the door looks out.*]

MARGARET. And what if he shouldn't bring it back—
not ever.

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. We've the gold for it then.

MARGARET. Gold for it! Five pounds we have. Tell me, Master Hans, wilt thou paint me again if—if he does not—

HOLBEIN. He will bring it. Five pounds! If he had been born an earl—perhaps no. But my Lord Cromwell, he was born son of a smith. Never fear, Meg mein kindchen.

MOXON. Now by the—the—the— Ye've all gone and forgotten my beer again. I call it downright heartless and unmannerly, and me so patient with an itch on my nose. But it's only what might be expected of foreigners, no souls in them, no souls whatever.

HOLBEIN. [*To Mistress Chepster, who has taken the money from the Art Patron.*] Here, give me the tuppence. I'll fetch the beer myself. Look to it Meg! If he moves whilst I'm gone, 'tis thine own fault.

[*Holbein takes a coin from Mistress Chepster and goes out.*]

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Tuppence from five shillings leaves—

MARGARET. Go back to thy spinning, mother. I'll be staying here with Nick. [*Mistress Chepster goes into the inner room, counting the money. Meg takes up a bunch of brushes and begins to wash them, her back to the room.*]

MOXON. I've a mind to give thee all my opinion of foreigners. Low, no hearts, no souls in them, no sympathy whatever; and furthermore I'll wager thee that this Master Holbein of thine will forget my beer again, or drink it himself most likely. Aye, that's it. I've a feeling in my spine I'll never get it, the unmannerly foreign dog.

MARGARET. Hold thy prattle, hold it, I say. I'll not have thee slandering the good Master Holbein behind his back.

MOXON. Oh, the wickedness of young girls! 'Tis plain to see thou lovest him, Meg, for all thy talk! Dost think he'll marry thee lass, eh?

MARGARET. Shut thy trap! Where wouldst thou be without Master Holbein? In the gutter, most like—thee with a face on thee to frighten God Almighty. Why Master Holbein, that's kindness and patience itself, can't bear to sit and paint thy fat body without I must cover thy face with a napkin.

MOXON. Nay, it's not my face I take pride in, though once I had a face that would please some of better blood than thine. 'Tis my beautiful hands, and knowing how to sit still in fine clothes that makes me what I am.

MARGARET. "The best model in London." I've heard thee say it often enough.

MOXON. Aye, that I am. Where's another like me? A true gentleman born to sit for thrippence an hour. I'm thinking of what Master Holbein would do without me now and furthermore, I'm thinking about the wretched wilfulness of young girls, and the evil trickery of foreigners, and and—and—about my half gallon of beer that I'll never, never, never get. [*He nods.*]

MARGARET. Go to sleep. Go to sleep. Thy beer is being fetched for thee. Go to sleep.

MOXON. Aye, and I will so. But harkee, when I wake, if 'tis not at my elbow, I will be as a lion in anger, as a red, red plague upon this house and them—that's—deceived me with false promises. [*He sleeps.*]

MARGARET. [*She busies herself with the brushes.*] Oh—ah—If you'd sleep more, Nick Moxon, and talk less—
[*Enter King Henry incognito. He looks much like a bailiff or a small tradesman. He shuts the door quietly, looks about him. Sees Meg, tiptoes over to Moxon. Sees that he sleeps, and stands looking at the portrait of himself. She turns and discovers him.*]

MARGARET. Another man! Serve you, sir?

THE KING. Possibly, possibly, my lass. Call Master Hans. (*Moxon at the sound of the King's voice arouses himself, draws the kerchief from his face, and stares.*)

MARGARET. He'll be back soon. Prints is it you want, sir?

KING. No.

MARGARET. Or maybe thou'rt the man who called for the drawing of the German stove. Well, it's not ready. Master Holbein has had great portraits to make for great people. He's had no time for the stove.

MOXON. [*In a frightened whisper.*] The King!

KING. I know nothing of this matter of a German stove.

MARGARET. It's as well. I'll not have Master Holbein pestered with such—[*She scrubs vigorously at the brushes. Moxon gets down, kneels to the King and is about to address him. Henry puts his finger to his lips, and sends him off. As he is about to go through the door, Meg looks up, sees him going and runs after him, catching his cloak. Moxon leaves the cloak in her hands, crying "Let me go!" in a smothered voice, and disappears. She turns angrily to the King.*]

MARGARET. See, now, what thou'st done. Nick Moxon gone and the portrait of his Majesty to finish.

KING. I don't follow thee, lass.

MARGARET. Of course not. Here's the work spoiled, and our model gone, and thou and thy stove—

KING. I tell thee I never heard of this stove. I'm a gentleman come to see a portrait—a portrait for my Lord Cromwell.

MARGARET. So! And mayhap thou hast an order from Lord Cromwell—

KING. I've the authority of the King in this matter.

MARGARET. And thou look'st to make me swallow that? when my Lord Cromwell was here but a moment ago and took the portrait with him. Do I look so simple, sir?

KING. I'll not stand chaffering—

MARGARET. [*In a rage.*] Chaffering? Thou com'st with a lie about my Lord Cromwell and a lie about the King's authority, and not a penny for the drawing of the German stove, and thou'st driven off Nick Moxon, and how Master Holbein can finish the King's portrait, I know not; and I'm trying to look to things for him and he'll frown on me, and I can never bear to have him look cross o' me—him that's so gentle and lonely. [*She weeps.*]

KING. There, there, lass! Woman's tears I could never endure, and I've had many of 'em, too. Here's a crown for thee. Let's have a smile.

MARGARET. A smile for a crown from a stranger! Na'y and Holbein frowning at me? And Nick Moxon gone utterly?

KING. I'd not cross thee, lass. What's to be done?

MARGARET. Done! The portrait's to be done.

KING. And this Moxon?

MARGARET. He was sitting for the hands,—the only model in Blackfriars with hands like a gentleman.

KING. I see—hands like a King's, eh?

MARGARET. And now he's gone and Master Holbein will be delayed, and I've driven him so. And there's an hour of light left. [*Weeps again.*]

KING. [*Going over to her.*] My hands, my lass—are they not white?

MARGARET. Thy hands—what if they be, and Holbein angry with me?

KING. There, my lass. Put thou the cloak upon me. I will be silent. I will sit still and listen and wait. There my pretty, I'd not have the eyes of thy love darkened. I'll serve for the King as well as another. I'd not have thee weeping. There. [*Sits in chair.*] The kerchief, lass. Dry thine eyes.

MARGARET. It's but fair of thee, sir, since thou madest the trouble.

KING. Sst! Steps coming. Smile. And one thing more. When Holbein comes in, ask him one question for me. Ask him what he thought of the looks of the German princess. For a good friend and one willing to help thee in a pinch, ask him that.

MARGARET. I'll ask him nothing of the sort. Who am I to be asking about great ladies?

KING. Ask him for me, or I— [*Starts to get up and take off the cloak.*]

MARGARET. I will, sir. I will—though it's precious impudent thou art—[*Enter Holbein.*]

HOLBEIN. Here it is, lass, the half gallon thy Nick hath been crying for so long. I'd have fetched it sooner, but for the old gentleman I met in the street, the old gentleman that pesters me to design him a true German stove.

MARGARET. Aye, the whole of London has set itself to waste thy time, and thou with scarce half an hour of light left, and old Nick asleep, still as a mouse.

HOLBEIN. Thou'rt a good lass. I had done ill without the knave, for all my talk against him. I can paint by no other. Here, Nick, wake up and take thy—

MARGARET. Hush, hush! 'twere foolish to waken him, and him with the very stillness of death on him. Get to thy work. There may be no need to give him the beer at all—and tuppence saved.

HOLBEIN. [*Sitting down to paint.*] A mercenary little wretch thou art, Megchen.

MARGARET. 'Tis well for thee I am.

HOLBEIN. He hath somehow disarranged a little the drapery. [*Makes a move toward the King.*]

MARGARET. Nay, nay, thou'll waken him. I remember well how it should be. [*She arranges the cloak over the King's knees.*]

HOLBEIN. He hath somehow lost the kingly look.

MARGARET. He looks the same as ever to me.

HOLBEIN. Ah, well, I must take thy word for everything, lass.

MARGARET. [*With embarrassment*] Tell me, Master Holbein, is Germany a fair country to live in?

HOLBEIN. No!

MARGARET. Are the—are the German women more beautiful than English women, thinkst thou?

HOLBEIN. No, no. They are mostly—what shall I say—

MARGARET. But not all of them? Now this princess Ann of Cleves—

HOLBEIN. Hush. I am forbidden to speak of her.

MARGARET. But between thee and me alone—come, now, what didst think of her?

HOLBEIN. Between thee and me, lass—well, to be quite honest with thee— [*A knock is heard.*]
Hush. It may be my Lord Cromwell come back. Go to the door. [*Margaret runs to the door, and the Second Art Patron enters.*]

MARGARET. Well, and thy business?

PATRON. [*To Holbein*] Aha, so I've found thee, Master Hans Holbein, eh?

HOLBEIN. And since when hast thou lost me?

PATRON. Since not ten minutes gone. We were discussing the design of a German stove, a tile stove, a veritable Dutch tile stove. I gave thee the minute particulars of my needs in the matter.

HOLBEIN. Ja. Holding me by the sleeve the while. Well, sir. I have the particulars. I have promised thee the design. In the meantime I have other work—

PATRON. I had not gone a hundred paces after leaving thee when I bethought me of the figure of Minerva which should be atop of the stove.

MARGARET. By thy leave, Master Holbein hath things of more importance than stoves to be thought on to-day.

PATRON. Hath he so? Then I'll trouble him to give me back the five shillings he had of me in advance.

MARGARET. Hast thou indeed had five shillings from this gentleman? [*Holbein nods. She turns to the Patron.*] Come back in an hour and thou shalt have the drawing.

PATRON. Well, well, and if it be not ready in an hour, I'll have my five shillings back, that I will.

MARGARET. [*Hustling him out.*] I promise thee. [*Turns to Holbein.*] Five shillings he gave thee?

HOLBEIN. Aye, and I've a mind to go after him and give them back.

MARGARET. Thou'lt not. Thou'lt draw the design and give me the shillings. Come, give them up, I say.

HOLBEIN. [*Fishes out the shillings and hands them over.*] Thou'rt too hard, Meg, too hard altogether. How shall I find time, think'st thou, to do all this?

MARGARET. In half an hour the light will fail thee for painting. Thou canst draw the stove under the candle.

HOLBEIN. Slave-driver! Ah well, ah well.

MARGARET. Tell me now, thou wert saying something of this Princess Ann of Cleves?

HOLBEIN. That I was, and there's much to be said. Harkee, lass, she's a lady that would— [*A knock at the door.*] Hush, that will be my Lord Cromwell surely. [*Margaret opens the door. The first Old Gentleman enters.*]

MARGARET. Thou again; and what has brought thee back?

FIRST OLD GENTLEMAN. A trick, a beggarly trick! Lookee, Master Hans Holbein, thou hast put upon me by reason of my short sight, and the failure of my spectacles. This fifth print in the Dance of Death is foxed and wrinkled and done upon most vile paper!

MARGARET. Go to! How are we to know thou hast not changed it at some print-sellers'?

OLD GENTLEMAN. Wha'—wha' sayest thou? I, I a librarian of the King, I—I to change a print?

HOLBEIN. Hold thy peace, Meg. Give the gentleman the portfolio. Let him choose one for himself.

MARGARET. [*Taking down the portfolio.*] He ought to be glad of his first bargain.

HOLBEIN. Nay, lass, let him be content.

OLD GENTLEMAN. [*Selects a print, looks at it closely, chuckles, and tucks it under his arm.*] Thankee, Master Holbein, thankee. A perfect set—and a marvellous bargain. Aha! [*Exit Old Gentleman.*]

MARGARET. As thou wert saying about the Princess Ann of Cleves—

HOLBEIN. The Princess Ann of Cleves is—well, she is—let me think how to put it to thee— [*Enter Mistress Chepster.*]

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Meg, Meg, there's a file of pikemen going by in the street. Thou canst see them from my window. [*The King emits a bored groan, and settles down in the chair.*]

HOLBEIN. What ails thee, Nick Moxon?

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. [*Pulling Meg's arm.*] Come to the windows! They'll be gone by, I tell thee. [*The King gives a loud snore, and his head sinks on his breast.*]

HOLBEIN. The devil! I never saw him do that before. [*The King snores again, and his arm falls from the arm of the chair, breaking the pose.*]

HOLBEIN. He hath broken the pose. [*He tiptoes over to the King.*]

MARGARET. [*Starting after him.*] No, no! [*Holbein removes the napkin from the King's face. The King does not wake. Holbein starts back to where Margaret stands wringing her hands.*]

HOLBEIN. [*In a whisper.*] Mine eyes, is there aught wrong with mine eyes! Who—who is that?

MARGARET. [*Whimpering.*] Nick Moxon went away. I was frightened. I fetched a stranger in to take his place. I thought it would please thee. 'Tis a man off the street. I—I—don't shake me!

HOLBEIN. Mary in Paradise! 'Tis the King! The King himself!

MARGARET. Art thou mad!

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Magic in my house! Black witchcraft in mine own house. Nick Moxon changed to the likeness of the King. Cover his face, Master Holbein, and let us say prayers. Let us say prayers against the evil that's come upon us. [*Holbein tiptoes over toward the King, and is about to put the napkin back, when the King gives a loud snort and wakes himself up.*]

KING. Eh! Ah! Where am I? What's the time?

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Oh, God save and forgive us, 'tis the living King himself. Oh, your Gracious Majesty! Oh, oh, oh! [*She falls on her knees.*]

KING. [*To Mistress Chapster.*] Get up off thy knees, woman. I'll not eat thee. [*To Margaret*] Come, lass, don't stand there gaping at me. I'm not a poppet show. Well, why doesn't somebody say something. Have ye all turned to stone?

HOLBEIN. Nay, sire, but no one knows what to say to thee.

KING. Well, Master Hans Holbein, I may as well tell thee it straight out. I came here with a purpose. Thou hast painted a portrait of the Lady Ann of Cleves. I must see it.

HOLBEIN. I regret, sire, I have it not. It was taken this morning by my Lord Cromwell, at whose order I have done it.

KING. So ho! That's the cry is it. Sit down all of ye, sit down! There'll be much talking amongst us before I get to the bottom of this.

HOLBEIN. I was not in the house when my lord took away the picture, but doubtless he was impatient to carry it at once to thy gracious Majesty.

KING. Was he so? I have a shrewd suspicion not, Master Hans. I have had information, I may say. I'll wager thee now, my Lord Cromwell is none too anxious that I see thy portrait to-day, Master Hans. That's why I'm here, man, to see for myself, with mine own eyes, before he gets a chance to play me any more of his tricks.

HOLBEIN. I do not understand. I have done only what is right and honest. The picture is ordered by my Lord Cromwell. It is finished. He hath sent for it. It is gone. I cannot conjure it back.

KING. Oh, yes, yes! That's all very well! If it is gone, it is gone and not thy fault, I daresay. But tell me, Master Holbein, what sort of a woman is this German princess.

HOLBEIN. [*To Meg*] Meg! Meg! Was it his Majesty that put thee up to asking me the same question awhile since?

MARGARET. How was I to know who he was? I meant no harm. I swear I didn't. He might have been honest with me.

KING. 'Twas a bargain between us: I to sit in place of thy model and Meg to ask thee a simple question. No harm meant by either of us, I give thee my word.

MARGARET. [*Snivelling*] I'm sure I did my best to serve the both of ye. I asked the question three times.

KING. [*Again afraid of her tears*] There! There! I know thou didst, but the cursed interruptions! What with old men with squeally voices—talking of stoves and Dances of Death and what not, and the heat of the room, I became that bored, I fear me I near fell asleep.

MARGARET. And was that my fault or Master Holbein's, let me ask?

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Meg! Meg! Lord have mercy! What a girl!

KING. [*To Mistress Chepster*] Let her run on. I'm that used to women fussing and fuming that I don't heed her at all. By-the-by now, Mistress What's-thy-name? Thou'rt a sensible English woman. Thou hast seen this portrait. What saist thou of the lady's beauty?

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. I—I—I never saw the portrait, sire. Never clapped my eyes on the face of it, so help me God!

KING. Never saw it! Never saw it! When it was done in thy own house, and thou a woman?

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Master Holbein is most particular against any but himself seeing the face of a picture till it hath had what he calls the last touch.

KING. But I warrant the lass here hath had her look. Come Mistress Meg, what hast thou to say?

MARGARET. What would I be doing, to look at it against Master Holbein's expressed orders.

KING. Confound ye all! Come, Master Hans, I ask thee once more, tell me what this German princess hath amiss with her that ye must all keep so mum about her.

HOLBEIN. Oh, sire, it is not that the least thing is amiss.

KING. Then describe her to me at once.

HOLBEIN. My brush is ever more ready than my tongue. My Lord Cromwell hath the only true description.

KING. Damn it all, I'll not be played with in this fashion. Do you think I believe one word of what ye've been telling me? each and all of ye? I thought to get honest fair treatment from honest plain people; and what's the result? I find you're as bad as my own courtiers. Can I get nothing in England the way I want it?

HOLBEIN. But his Majesty hath only to give his instructions.

KING. Hath he so? Look ye now. A king is in a bad way to get what he wants in this world if his ministers are of contrary mind. It's right seldom I have my own way.

MISTRESS C. To think of thee not having aught thou wantest and thou with silks and satins and velvets on thee seven days in the week.

KING. Oh, aye, but some of what I have to wear on me is damned uncomfortable too, for all the fine names they have. Now, Holbein, as man to man, wilt thou thou do me a service?

HOLBEIN. I am at your Majesty's service.

KING. I know—I know—but that does not answer me. Let me open the matter fully. Thou hast made a portrait of a princess in Germany—so much is admitted. Holbein—hast thou a wife?

HOLBEIN. Aye—God preserve me!

KING. A German wife?

HOLBEIN. Aye.

KING. Where is she?

HOLBEIN. Happily, sire, she is in Germany.

KING. I begin to see a light. Thou art content that she remain in Germany, so long as thou dost not. She's an excellent woman, no doubt.

HOLBEIN. No doubt of it, sire—but I can not be content in the same province with her.

KING. She's a German woman, I take it, well past her girlhood, eh? Not too well favoured, eh?

HOLBEIN. Even so, sire.

KING. Now, Holbein, follow me well. Thou knowest what it is to have a German wife of these years and favour. What of me? My chancellor, thy patron Cromwell, is set on bringing me such a wife, and lookee, once I get her, I must even stay in the same province with her.

HOLBEIN. My heart bleeds for thee, sire.

KING. Ah! Then this Anne of Cleves is all I have pictured her! She is—

HOLBEIN. I have not spoken of her, sire.

KING. Thou'st told me, plain enough. Out with it now. This picture Cromwell hath—is it honest? Is it like the woman?

HOLBEIN. I have done mine endeavour, sire.

KING. Let that pass. Thou seest my straits, Holbein. The truth, now, as a man.

HOLBEIN. But my Lord Cromwell is my patron—

KING. So. I'll promise thee only this: thou shalt suffer naught from him. Think of thy wife. Think of this Anne of Cleves. Think of me—and tell me the matter right out.

HOLBEIN. As I live, sire, I will. My Lord Cromwell took with him the wrong portrait. Here is the lady Anne of Cleves. [*Unveils picture.*]

KING. Mary Mother of Heaven!

HOLBEIN. It is as true, sire, as any hand in the world could draw it.

KING. And me to be wed to that, and never a word to say for myself. Ah, I'm the unluckiest wretch in England, what with ministers and marriages. What an eye she hath—and a mouth like a rift in a wall. Now let Cromwell look to himself. It is as I thought. And if this be less than high treason— [*There is a loud knock.*]

CROMWELL. [*Outside*] Holbein, Holbein, thou rascal!

HOLBEIN. My Lord Cromwell's voice.

KING. Cover this calamity! [*Holbein covers the picture.*]
[*Enter Cromwell.*]

CROMWELL. Holbein, he's coming here—[*Sees the King.*] Sire! I have made haste, sire, that this painter-man might make ready for this honour. I regret that I have been too late.

KING. Far from it, my lord. Thou art in time.

CROMWELL. I have with me the portrait of the princess.

KING. Ah, thou hast it with thee, eh?

CROMWELL. Aye, and a most excellent work it is. I do commend Master Holbein to thee, sire, for a painter of honest worth—even as in this he doth commend the beauty of the Princess of Cleves. [*He unveils the portrait of Meg.*]

KING. So this is the lady, eh?

CROMWELL. Yes, sire.

KING. It's bonny enough, but somehow it seems I have beheld that face afore.

CROMWELL. I know not how, your Majesty, unless in the foreknowledge of dreams—

KING. Nay, in the life. Come hither, Meg.

CROMWELL. [*Stepping between King and Meg.*] Sire, I beseech thee—

KING. [*Haling Meg out and standing her by the picture.*] A painter of honest worth, truly. [*He unveils the portrait of Anne of Cleves.*] And now, my Lord Cromwell, tell me who is this lady?

CROMWELL. This lady, sire—ah, Master Hans, this is a strange trick thou hast played us—a stocks and rack and gallows trick—this lady, sire, is an excellent woman in Germany—she is Master Holbein's wife.

HOLBEIN. Now this is too much! I do what I can for thee, my lord. I give thee what I have, and I serve thee faithfully. But my wife, even though I cannot live in the same province with her—I will not have my wife so slandered. No.

KING. Bravo, Hans. By Heaven, I make thee court painter of England for this!

CROMWELL. Sire, this fellow hath tricked me most vilely, most unscrupulously—

KING. And thou, my lord, how hast thou tricked me? This is the lady thou hast chosen for me, eh? Tell me now, straight out, how far hast thou gone in this business?

CROMWELL. Sire, this portrait—

KING. Answer me, sirrah.

CROMWELL. The envoys have gone, sire. The State is bound to this marriage.

KING. This lies close to the edge of high treason, Thomas Cromwell. I have long suspected thy German bargains and alliances. Bring this woman to me, and I will put her away. I will not see her. And thou—look to thine honours and thine offices. Begone! [*Cromwell starts to go out; Mistress Chepster runs after him.*]

MISTRESS CHEPSTER. Thy three pounds, my lord, for the safe return of the picture.

[*Cromwell, with a despairing gesture swings out past her. The King seats himself in the model's throne.*]

KING. God-a-mercy, what a day! [*He picks up the flagon.*]

HOLBEIN. And now, sire, for the portrait!

CURTAIN

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